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Title of the extended essay: Can war be morally justified?

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The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

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wanted to use this research opportunity to extend her understanding of war by applying and developing theories discussed in class in a context she had a personal interest in.

has used a range of appropriate resources to address the question posed and applied analytical skills to evaluate different perspectives.

has used philosophized terminology throughout the essay and the divisions help to build the argument. She has used the research to reach her own informed decision in response to the question posed.

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I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

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I spent hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

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Assessment form (for examiner use only)

Criteria	Achievement level					
	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3	
A research question	2	2		2		
B introduction	1	2		2		
C investigation	3	4		4		
D knowledge and understanding	3	4		4		
E reasoned argument	4	4		4		
F analysis and evaluation	3	4		4		
G use of subject language	3	4		4		
H conclusion	2	2		2		
I formal presentation	4	4		4		
J abstract	2	2		2		
K holistic judgment	4	4		4		
Total out of 36		31				



Can War Be Morally Justified?

IB Extended Essay

Candidate Name:

Centre Number:

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Abstract

War is a brutal act of violence that has occurred throughout the history and evolution of mankind. On the 19th March 2003, America declared a war against Iraq. This war has since been recognised as one of the most significant and brutal conflicts of the 21st century. In this essay, I address the morality of war by evaluating the theories which serve as a justification for the act of war. Due to the broad nature of 'war', I have chosen to focus my essay primarily on the Iraqi War of 2003. I have chosen to evaluate this war in particular, as it is a war which I have been exposed to throughout my childhood as a result of media coverage. I will use this war as the main example to carry out ethical and philosophical discussion. Firstly, I will identify the theory of the Just War Argument¹ with a brief outline focusing on the main criteria. I then proceed to offer a critique of the Just War theory with an evaluation that introduces an alternative view to the morality of war. From here, I consider the teleological arguments² which can be used to support the waging of a war, which I refute and evaluate also using a teleological approach. Finally, I consider alternative features of war that must be acknowledged in my essay, such as the causes of war itself and the moral responsibility of the state. I then conclude that war is absolutely wrong, as it is a method that places the sacredness of human life at jeopardy.

Word Count: 259

¹ M. Wilcockson, Issues of life and death (London: Hodder&Stoughton), p.106

² R. Bowie, Ethical Studies, 2nd Edition (Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd), p.6

Introduction

“War is a zone of radical coercion”³

War kills. This fact alone raises an array of complex moral and ethical issues. Beyond the fact that war is an activity of violence which results in death, there are other aspects which need to be considered during the discussion of war. The fundamental issue that is raised concerns whether a war can ever be regarded as morally just and under what criteria. Additionally, it is important to recognize the idealistic aims that lie in the root of war. For example, the onset of war may be caused by a combination of emotional, religious or political motivations. This raises a question as to whether moral responsibility in the event of war belongs to the state or to the individual citizen.

I believe that war is intrinsically wrong and cannot be justified morally. There should be no distinction made between private and public morality. Killing is objectively wrong in any context; as life is sacred and should be preserved. Thus, the option of war under any circumstance is immoral. In this essay, I aim to examine the ethical problems which arise when assertions are made that war is a necessary means as a

³ M. Walzer, Arguing about War, (USA: Yale University Press), p. x.

resolution to disputes between opposing forces. I will also consider the role of the political state in the nature and onset of war. Finally, I will consider whether war is a field where all morals of civil society are abandoned as argued by some philosophers who hold that *inter arma silent leges* (in time of war, the laws are silent).⁴

a) Placing war into context

It is necessary that the issues concerning the morality of warfare are treated with precision and clarity. Despite the complex and diverse nature of war, a definition can still be formed. Clausewitz addresses the definition of war in his work 'On War', describing it as 'a duel on an extensive scale'⁵ as well as 'an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will'⁶. This definition seems to offer a useful scope for the understanding of traditional wars. However, in light of the advances and influences of modern technology, it is necessary to form a conceptualised definition of war. The definition of war, for the purposes of my essay will be 'the inclusion of civilians and civilian infrastructure as targets in destroying a countries

⁴ Ibid. p. ix.

⁵ C. Clausewitz, *On War*, (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition Ltd), p. 5.

⁶ C. Clausewitz, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

ability to engage in war'.⁷ To offer a scope of context into this discussion, the American Invasion into Iraq in 2003⁸ will be used to illustrate my argument.

2) War is Just

a) The Just War Theory

The Just War Theory claims that war is sometimes a necessary instrument of the state. According to the Just War Theory⁹, there are conditions which must be met to quantify a war as 'just' which is characterized by two main criteria that are closely linked together. The first criterion is 'Jus Ad Bellum'¹⁰ which highlights the justifications for going to war. The second criterion is 'Jus in Bello',¹¹ which addresses the code of conduct that should be adhered to during war.

⁷ Wikipedia 2012, Modern Warfare

⁸ Wikipedia 2012, The Iraqi War 'The **Iraq War** was an armed conflict in Iraq that consisted of two phases. The first was an invasion of Ba'athist Iraq by the United States.....'

⁹ M. Wilcockson, Issues of life and death (London: Hodder&Stoughton), p.106. 'The main just war propositions are:

- War must be sanctioned by legitimate authority
- There must be a just cause
- War must be fought with the right intention
- War must be the last resort
- There must be proportional means in war
- Non-combatants must be given immunity in war'

¹⁰ M. Wilcockson, ibid., p.106.

¹¹ M. Wilcockson, ibid., p.106.

Two important conditions in 'Jus Ad Bellum', proposed by Aquinas,¹² are that the option to go to war must be governed by a just intention and a just cause. Just intention refers to war being used as a means to achieve the ultimate goal of peace. Just cause refers to the notion that those who wage war must have a good reason to do so.

On the other hand, 'Jus In Bello' proposes that a level of proportionality should be considered in the event of war. This means that a minimum level of force should be used to achieve the ultimate goal of peace.

The Just War Theory suggests that war in itself is wrong, however it can be made moral by acknowledging a set of guidelines before war is called and during the course of war. The theory recognizes that under some circumstances, war is merely a necessary instrument which is used to achieve peace in society.

b) Critique of Just War Theory

There are three criticisms that I will offer about the Just War Argument.

¹² R. Bowie, opcit., p.279.

Firstly, it can be seen that the justice of war is already presumed in the Just War theory. Instead of highlighting the underlying concepts of war, the argument simply outlines the legal, moral and political precautions which should be adhered to should any nation consider going to war.

Secondly, the argument offers a somewhat cynical view of the nature of war and simplifies war to a list of criteria that seems almost impossible to meet. For example, the just cause criterion for 'Jus Ad Bellum' asserts that a legitimate authority may judge what a just cause is. This raises the issue concerning whether an institution can be considered unbiased in their view of what should constitute a just war. Furthermore, it is difficult to see whether an international body would be completely objective in authorizing a war.

Thirdly, the Just War Theory seems to be somewhat ambiguous in the use of the word *just*. What criteria would make the American Invasion against Iraq just? A just cause is too vague and complicated leaving space for any nation to wage war with the excuse that they possess a just motive. In my opinion, the notion of 'justness' in war is completely fallible. This is because the term 'just' refers to equality and justice

on both parts, which is impossible in the case of war, where the goal is to destroy the morale and place an imbalance on one's enemy. This is supported by Clausewitz where he states, 'each strives by physical force to compel the other to submit to his will.'¹³ which suggests that war cannot logically as well as morally be held as 'just'.

c) Evaluation of the Just War Theory

So far, I have offered criticism of the aspects of 'Jus Ad Bellum' showing the difficulties that arise when war is deemed as possessing a 'just' cause. In my evaluation of the Just War Theory, I aim to identify a key ethical issue concerning the criterion of 'Jus In Bello' which will lead on to a further discussion concerning the morality of war.

A key theme that forms an aspect of the 'Jus In Bello' criterion, is the use of proportionality in the event of war. This refers to the notion that only necessary force should be used to achieve the ultimate goal of peace. Thus, in the event of war, the means taken must be proportional to the end. However, it is difficult to calculate before a war how much force can be used to achieve the ultimate goal of peace.

¹³ C. Clausewitz, op.cit., p. 5.

America's intention to go to war was argued to be a preventative and defensive method against the possibilities that the Iraqi Government may be in possession of weapons of mass destruction.¹⁴ The means for going to war, then has to be measured against the consequences of going to war. The Iraq Family Health Survey recorded 151,000 fatalities within the first three years of the Iraqi War.¹⁵ This raises concerns as to whether the Just War Theory compromises human life in its effort to classify some wars as just. The fact that innocent lives are at risk during war can undermine the criterion for proportionality. Can we justify war when the consequences are so devastating? Moreover, a further question is identified about whether the outcome of war is sufficient to justify the means of war.

3) Teleological Considerations

a) War as a justified means

The teleological ethical system of utilitarianism set out by Jeremy Bentham,¹⁶ identifies how actions can be considered moral or immoral, good or bad.

¹⁴ Wikipedia 2012, George W. Bush and the Iraq War "we will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder."

¹⁵ Wikipedia 2012, Iraq War

¹⁶ R. Bowie, opcit., p.43.

Bentham worked on the assumption that what is right for society depends on the happiness of the individuals within society. The morality or immorality of an action will solely depend on the predicted results in generating the maximum amount of happiness.¹⁷ This utilitarian perspective argues that the end of an action holds more value than the means taken.

With the utilitarian perspective taken into account, it can be argued that the war waged against Iraq can be morally justified as it aimed to provide utility to the majority. The aim of the Iraqi war mission was essentially to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, the final goal of the war was to essentially provide maximum utility to the global community. An example that exemplifies this view are the effects of World War Two which can be argued to have made people unhappy, however in the long term World War Two saw many generations in Europe to be made happier through advances in medicine, technology and other fields. It Therefore, war is an activity that results in the lesser of two evils and maximizes the utility of the majority. G.E.M Anscombe argues in her paper *War and Murder* that the

¹⁷ M. Thompson, Ethical Theory, (London:Hodder&Stoughton), p. 75.

innocent should always be protected, and by failing to take a course of action to stop the wicked, one is condoning evil.¹⁸

b) Critique of a teleological approach

The utilitarian approach to the justification of war does have clear benefits, in that a clear link is made between the want for more happiness and less suffering. However, the argument fails on its own premise. It suggests that pleasure is the ultimate good, whereas pain is the ultimate evil. Undoubtedly, pain has been experienced on a large scale in the Iraqi War, not just on the behalf of the soldiers who fought, but on the emotional behalf of families, friends, and citizens of the wider community. Hence, the aftermath of war is not the least proportional, to the means taken to in war. The consequences of war cannot be justified, the statistics of the Iraqi War show that the aftermath of war induced heightened pain and decreased pleasure and happiness amongst the masses.

c) Evaluation of a teleological approach

¹⁸ M. Wilcockson, op.cit., p.105.

Bentham's utilitarianism argues that moral dilemmas should be solved by acting in ways that bring about the maximum possible amount of happiness for the majority of people. However, the maximum amount of happiness is a non-empirical measurement. It is impractical for one to measure the degree of happiness or pleasure caused by the war. Not only does the question lie in how we can objectively measure happiness, but there is also a problem as to whose happiness we should consider. Walzer addresses this in *Arguing about War* by mentioning that 'we have no unit of measurement and we have no common or uniform scale'.¹⁹

Another difficulty that arises with the utilitarian perspective is the notion of justice. For example, the happiness of the majority is valued over the minority. It can be seen that in some scenarios, malicious acts can be justified based purely on the heightening of happiness for the majority. Hypothetically, if five bullies took pleasure in hurting one person, according to Utilitarianism their act would be justified. However, this analogy is difficult to apply to the Iraqi War where the majority is indistinguishable. Who is the majority and who is the minority? The group whose

¹⁹ M. Walzer, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

happiness should be valued will always be subjective. Such questions which arise from the utilitarian viewpoint make the subject of morality too complicated. It is impossible for happiness to be measured empirically. Furthermore, it is difficult to find an institution that can be neutral in deciding whose happiness should be considered.

Ockham's Razor states that the best argument is the one with the least entities²⁰, and I have shown that the utilitarian perspective is too complicated to apply to an activity such as war. It is impractical to measure the morality of war based on subjective interpretations of happiness or pleasure. This may suggest that an objective standpoint such as Pacifism is required to assess the morality of war.

4) Alternative Considerations

So far, I have considered the moral issues that arise when war classified as a necessary course of action. I have offered criticisms of the Just War Theory and Utilitarianism, arguments that are commonly used to justify the act of war. In this

²⁰ Wikipedia 2012, [Occam's Razor](#)

section, I aim to establish the role of the state in the event of war, and whether this detracts morality from the nature of war itself.

a) A Holy Order

A militarist approach would hold that war is an outward act of moral goodness and is also expressive of state ideals. This argument can be used also to suggest that war may be an order sanctioned by a higher power or deity. A question is raised here regarding whether war can be justified if it is sanctioned by God. Is it possible for a holy war to exist, and would this classify some wars as morally justifiable?

The American invasion into Iraq was identified by some as a holy war. It was reported that Bush had revealed his religious fervour for the American led invasions just four months after the invasion of Iraq, claiming that God had sent him to end the tyranny in Iraq.²¹ From a militarist perspective, it can be argued that this would quantify some wars as morally justifiable if it is claimed to be sanctioned by God or otherwise identified as an modern crusade. Bonhoeffer is often a notable figure who is referred to as an example of resistance against tyranny and force in a Nazi

²¹ E. MacAskill, The Guardian 2005, ["George Bush: 'God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq'"](#)

Germany.²² When Bonhoeffer did decide to use physical force for the cause of destroying Hitler, he categorised his actions as an act of allegiance to the call of God. In the same way, it can be seen that Bush's decision to go to war was governed by his desire to fulfil the call of God.

A problem is identified in the assertion that war is expressive of higher ideals such as religious beliefs and identity. Firstly, it is difficult to comprehend God's omnibenevolent nature as capable of sanctioning an activity which can lead to an immense amount of suffering. Furthermore, religion is almost used as a scapegoat to justify actions, though religion is not necessarily synonymous with morality. For example, Saddam Hussein made claims also that his regime was being attacked alongside Islam. With these claims, Saddam Hussein released a statement urging the Iraqi people to take up their jihad.²³ In the context of the Iraqi War, there was a conflict between both sides who claimed that they are acting out of response to their God. This raises the question of: Whose God? How can we know whether God revealed anything to George Bush? It is difficult to judge that such religious

²² R. Osborn, 2004.

²³ Newshour Extra 2003, Saddam Hussein Calls for Jihad

revelations were revealed to either Saddam Hussein or George Bush, therefore the militarist idealistic approach to war fails. War may be expressive of state ideals that happen to be religious in nature, however, this does not offer any justification for the causes and consequences of war.

b) Private morality VS Public Morality

I have shown so far, the militarist perspective of war, which holds that war is morally good and expressive of higher ideals. I have linked this to the notion of a 'holy war' which is closely linked to the Militarism²⁴ viewpoint.

Besides the religious influence in the onset of war, it is important to recognise the political influence which is perhaps intertwined at the root of war. Carl von Clausewitz asserted that 'war is the continuation of politics',²⁵ which means that war is a method in which political states choose to converse with one another. This epitomizes the view of the realist²⁶ who creates a firm distinction between private

²⁴ M. Wilcockson, op.cit., p.100.

²⁵ C. Clausewitz, op.cit., p.22. 'War is a mere continuation of policy by other means'

²⁶ M. Wilcockson, op.cit., p.99.

and public morality. For the realist, war is a morally justifiable public act as part of the process of maintaining law and order.²⁷

From a realist perspective, it can be argued that war is justified on behalf of the state who wages war as an instrument to pursue law and order in society. If the American Government had not taken the risk of invading Iraq, perhaps there would be opportunities open for any nation to possess weapons that could pose a high level of risk. Therefore, war is addressed as an act of violence or conflict that is representative of the state and should not be transferred to private morality.

A paradox is identified here, as it is difficult to distinguish between private and public morality. Walzer recognises how public and private morality is compromised in the realist position, using the 'Dirty Hands' paradox. Walzer defines the dirty hands paradox as that "according to which political and military leaders may sometimes find themselves in situations where they cannot avoid acting immorally, even when that means deliberately killing the innocent".²⁸ This paradox identifies the complexities that arise within politics and morality and shows that in extreme circumstances,

²⁷ M. Wilcockson, ibid.,

²⁸ C.A.J Coady, 2009, The Problem Of Dirty Hands,

moral standards can come into conflict with political obligations. The intuitionist view of ethics asserted by W.D Ross insists that all duties and obligations are prima facie (at first sight). This means that a prima facie duty not to kill will always clash with some other prima facie duty of protecting the state.²⁹ An implication of this is that an uneasy relationship is identified between private and public morality. This raises a further question as to whether we can define the morality of war by private standards.

It is argued by some scholars that different levels of morality exist, therefore when soldiers for example go to war, they are ritualistically stepping out of civil society into the realm of completely different moral dimensions. It is asserted that the effects and causes of war cannot be measured on moral grounds or paradigms because the concept of morality is rejected by the very nature of war. This leads on to the suggestion, that we cannot morally evaluate war. In other words, we cannot measure the morality of an event, where morality does not exist.

²⁹ Ibid.,

The division between public state moral responsibility and private moral responsibility raises the philosophical issue as to whether we can separate morality from politics. Moreover, it raises thought as to whether the purposes of fulfilling a political motive or action, can be held permissible to accept horrendous acts of force which we would hold unacceptable if the act was reduced to a private matter. It can be seen that private morality and public morality are linked and should not be separated in the event of war. Killing is killing, whether expressed on a private scale or a wider public scale. Carl von Clausewitz writes in his works 'theory cannot banish the moral forces beyond its frontier, because the effects of the physical forces and the moral are completely fused and are not to be decomposed like a metal alloy by a chemical process'.³⁰ This alludes that war is indeed a moral matter and is completely tied to the physical forces which are used as strategies to administer force on an enemy or an opponent.

³⁰ C. Clausewitz, op.cit., p.151.

c) Pacifist Approach

I have evaluated the concept of the militarist who holds that war is intrinsically right because it is a means by which identity can be expressed. I then contrasted this view with that of the realist where I identified the uneasy conflict that exists between the state and morality. In this section, I aim to address the pacifist position to war which argues that war is intrinsically wrong. The pacifist believes that the use of violence as a deterrent against violence only serves to prolong violence.

The view of the pacifist is very broad, as there are various variations of Pacifist thought.³¹ Pacifism has its tradition in Christian beliefs asserting that all war is intrinsically wrong, as it places a threat to human life which should be valued. The teachings present in Matthew 5:9³² encapsulates the vision of the pacifist who asserts that war is always wrong, and that peace should be sought under all and any circumstance. Therefore, the American War on Iraq is morally unjustifiable by pacifist standards.

³¹ R.G. Jones, Groundwork of Christian Ethics, (London: Epworth Press), p.89, 'there is no one single pacifist position'.

³² New Testament Bible, 'Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons of God'

For some, the pacifist view is argued to be unrealistic and inapplicable to society that is based on politics and relationships between the state. Reinhold Niebuhr argued that human nature is evil, therefore force is required to maintain a just and ordered society.³³ Niebuhr further criticizes the pacifist tradition by arguing that it 'is tragically naïve about human nature, assuming it to be readily reformable'.³⁴ With this perspective it can be argued that the pacifist perspective on war permits inaction in the event of war and ignores the option to defend the innocent. Anscombe argues in *War and Murder* that 'pacifism teaches people to make no distinction between the shedding of innocent blood and the shedding of any human blood'.³⁵ This suggests that pacifism, in denying the act of going to war, condones acts of wickedness.

I take the view that Pacifism does not condone the acts of wickedness, instead it rejects the use of violence to achieve an end. It could be seen that the tensions arising between the American and Iraqi Government could have been resolved using non-violent strategies. This view is aligned with the teachings of Martin Luther King who advocated the use of direct non-violent action to achieve a process of change.

³³ R. Bowie, *Ethical Studies*, 2nd Edition (Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes Ltd), p.285.

³⁴ R.G. Jones, *op.cit.*, p.96

³⁵ G.E.M. Anscombe, *War and Murder* (1961)

Martin Luther King employed the use of strikes, sanctions, peaceful protest and civil disobedience to reinforce political transformation.³⁶ This may suggest that adopting such non-violent methods could enforce change. Therefore it can be seen that the pacifist does not embrace the notion of inactiveness, instead it adopts pro-activeness through non-violent means. Thus, from a pacifist perspective, the Iraqi war is absolutely wrong and can never be morally justified.

5) Conclusion

From the discussions presented, it can be seen that war raises a multitude of ethical and moral questions concerning when and to what extent force can be classified as morally correct.

It has been shown that it is difficult to view the morality of war using ethical systems such as the Just War Theory or Utilitarianism. War is too complex an issue to refine to a theory that highlights ethical conditions that can only be adhered to from an subjective point of view. For example, the Just War Theory identifies the cause as

³⁶ M. Wilcockson, op cit., p.104

justifiable under some circumstances. Also the utilitarian, identifies happiness amongst the majority as the correct measure of morality. This leads on to the problematic question of: who can be objectively neutral to validate a cause as just, or an end as fulfilling the happiness of individuals of the majority group?

The militarist attempts to justify war on the basis that it is expressive of higher ideals and beliefs. However, in the event of war, it is difficult to determine whose ideals count. War is an event that does not accommodate equality, as shown from my argument. The realist takes an approach that views war as a necessary instrument of the state, where private moral standards should not be applied. Although war is an event that may be the primary concern between political states, this does not undermine its status as a moral issue. Morality remains a fundamental issue of the topic of war, yet, the approaches adopted by the utilitarian, the realist, the militarist and the Just War Theorist fail to identify the value of human life. Their approach to the recourse of war seems to be subjective in nature and present an overriding question of: Who decides?

It is necessary therefore to present a view that is strong, simple and absolute. It is intrinsically wrong to place a threat to human life. This means that even in the event of a war that may be identified as expressive³⁷, it is objectively wrong to kill or harm a life.

It is difficult to justify the Iraqi War morally when an immense amount of suffering has been caused. The option of war as a deterrent to evil only serves to prolong the evil in this world. In the words of Mahatma Ghandi, "an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind"³⁸. This quote perfectly inspires my opinion on the nature of war, which is that it can never serve to be a resolution to problems in our world. War is an activity that sets a precedent for the continuation of war-like behaviour rather than solving the root cause that lies within human conflict. Morally justifiable acts should serve to benefit the world in the long term. War, with it's infringement on the sanctity of life, does not fulfil these criteria.

³⁷ M. Wilcockson, op cit., p.96 'Expressive – some wars are fought to express an ideal or a political view'

³⁸ Ghandi International Institute for Peace 2012, Ghandi quote's

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